DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 763 RC 013 808

AUTHOR Clever, George
TITLE The Native American Dean: Two Shirts in Conflict.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *American Indians; College Administration; *Deans of Students; Higher Education; *Role Conflict; *Role Perception; *Student Teacher Relationship

ABSTRACT

Native American deans are at war with themselves daily trying to represent the Native American community, the university, and themselves. Native American deans counsel all students, monitor the students' academic performance, bring programs to the Culture Center, manage a discretionary budget for Native American programs, and do administrative duties (e.g., committees, teach an occasional class, research student achievement, and other office management). Native American deans become victims of gossip, character assassination, and short job tenure. Students need advocates of their concerns before university decision-makers. The relatively short time students spend on campus presents a severe restriction on petition for change. Yet, the Native American administrator has the dual responsibility of protecting university interests. Divide and conquer is applied regularly to minority staff over policy conflicts. Native American issues which are obvious and hidden include a European curriculum that discriminates by omission; a student split on the need for an American studies program; and a highly selective admission and non-existent minority influence in the process. Hidden agendas for Native American students include loneliness and not knowing who, among the student body, is really Indian. What students experience at the university, Native American deans have also experienced. (NQA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED225763

The Native American Dean: Two Shirts In Conflict

By

George Clever
Stanford University

1982

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

George Clever

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

RC013808

THE NATIVE AMERICAN DEAN: TWO SHIRTS IN CONFLICT

Native American deans will never be stars in University circles. It is not a popular time for minority interests in this country.

Thirteen months ago, I arrived at the University to begin a new phase in my education career, Assistant Dean for Native American Student Affairs. I have survived the rigors of a national search, three academic interviews and a student interview that lasted until four in the morning.

It was a wonderful opportunity to begin an administrative career at a prestigious university after 22 years teaching elementary, secondary and college mathematics. I welcomed the return to California sunshine, a break from the long weary winters of western Pennsylvania and a renewal from teaching fatigue.

There were personal goals in accepting this job, to be sure. The opportunity to work for better, higher education for American Indian students, was a top priority. I had seen, first-hand, the trouble created for Indian people by those educated at private universities. At Kinzu Dam in Seneca Country, the Tuscawara Power Plant, and Wounded Knee in 1973, my brothers and I recognized the need for Indian doctors, lawyers and engineers to represent our interests. Perhaps, a dean at this University could provide the way to educate more Indian professionals.

The first week as Dean, I was called at 2 a.m. to settle a problem in the Native

American priority dorm. A woman was drunk and breaking things. The following Friday, late in the afternoon, I had the unpleasant task of informing a parent that her son had killed himself.

My week generally includes academic counseling for all students. They bring personal problems, as well as academic. At 5 p.m., I may hurry home to gather family and food for a monthly pot luck. At 4 in the morning, I may hear a knock on the door. (We live in graduate housing because rents are beyond my salary.) A student or relative has some problem to solve. Our Native American students come to the University with extended families. One freshman brought his mother as a dependent.

You can't send a drunk away from the door as a Native American Dean in this community. It takes family intervention skills, alcohol and drug counseling, and money to support our students while they struggle through the University.

I am responsible for monitoring their academic performance, bringing programs to the Culture Center, and managing a discretionary budget for Native American programs. The Dean also does the usual administrative acts: Committees, teaching an occasional class, researching student achievement and other office management.

If you leave a job in a hurry, files seem to be left behind. I read through the office files of the previous Native American deans when I arrived during my first summer. They told an interesting story of political decisions, good plans frustrated and personal character assassinations.

The first dean's story was one of frustration and burn-out. She was a very active Native American advocate during the turbulent '60s. Another dean identified with student activism, using the University to achieve political goals. He took a long leave and was fired. The next dean was a Mormon, accused of moralizing by the students. He was tough on their honesty and academic work. The next woman dean was accused of using her sex to get the job and not being "Indian" enough. The last dean held the position until I could finish teaching in the east and move to the University. He played a lot of basketball with students, was a University graduate, identified with students in opposition to University interest and moved on campus to be a house father, while his wife finished graduate school. He could not get a favorable job recommendation from the University when he left.

The previous remarks are examples of the gossip and character assassination that cloud the history of the Native American deans at this University. The truth of these charges is not the issue. We must ask why educators in minority staff positions become victims of this type of abuse and short job tenure.

Students have an interest in staff administrators sympathetic to minority issues. They need advocates of their concerns before University decision-makers. The relatively short time students spend on campus presents a severe restriction on petition for change. Should the Native American dean ultimately be responsible for advocacy if grievances by the American Indian student community are to realize a long term effect? By summer, students have graduated or are at work. An obvious administrative strategy is to ride out the petition. By summer, it will all go away. Next year the students can start all over again. Maybe they won't bother. How much professional volunerability will a Native American staff

administrator be willing to risk with the dual responsibility of protecting University interests?

Divide and conquer is applied regularly to minority staff over policy conflicts. It is a useful strategy for we are our own worst enemy. We often question the education, skills and abilities of each other, prompted by cues derived from subtle inquiries from higher administrators. There is a certain amount of self depreciation. After all, we are only here because . . . . we are Indian.

The Native American issues are obvious and hidden. At my University, the obvious issues include a European curriculum that discriminates by omission. One student was told "This is American History, we will talk about the Constitution, not about Indians." The study of history, science, engineering, arts, government, farming and medicine deny the existence of ancient American civilizations. Our main contribution to society is a "cute" study of Indians during Thanksgiving.

Students are split on the need for an American studies program. These programs have a bad reputation as "soft" studies. You can't earn a living making beads. "The classes are poorly taught by non-certified professors", according to some students. One American Indian student told me he did not like to attend classes taught by elders because they told the same story over and over again. Schools and television have given our children a learning style with no tolerance for repetition or re-run. Short attention span is a handicap to those that would have learned from our oral traditions. Is it any wonder that the University is not pressured for Native American curriculum reform. This is a great loss for all students. Some say a land with no past will have no future.

The University Indian mascot is an annual fall harassment for reinstatement of the Indian symbol, promoted by ultra conservative alumni. This year, they led a painted pony into the Stadium, using forged passes, to gain assess to the gates. The forgery cost the organizers 50 service work days for the County, thanks to the local court.

Native American students organize to meet this challenge each year at great expense to study time. Their efforts have always been peaceful, as they try again each year to inform the community of the indignity of a phony Yurok prince in Sioux traditional clothes, dancing to the outrageous music of the University Band.

Increasing the number of Native American students at the University is an issue. Admissions is highly selective and minority influence in the process is non-existent. After funding 2 weeks of my recruiting time this year, the Admissions Office failed to acknowledge any of my recruiting trip reports or a request to review the results of Native American recruiting with their staff. The University admitted 6 Native Americans last year, a 10-year low for undergraduates. Law school, this year, admitted 4 Native Americans in a class of 400 students. Two appeared on campus in the Fall.

There are hidden agendas for Native American students. Who, among the student body, is really Indian? Well financed, well educated types keep appearing on the Native American roster. They are generally seen around sorority and fraternity houses, but seldom at the Native American Culture Center. Twenty-seven (27) of sixty (60) were identified as Native Americans who agreed to have their names and addresses on the public use list of Native Americans.

Students ask themselves, am I sure, are they Native American? Many are 5 generations off the reservation, have no strong family or tribal traditions, and live in upper class suburbia. What they know of their own tribal history is extremely limited. Few students have a base of knowledge of other tribes. They are concerned if they don't "look" enough Indian. Many question their personal commitment to serving their people when academic and professional interest lead them away. Students know that skills of leadership learned at the University are often not going to get them recognition in their own community.

Political activism, can we afford it with very demanding work and study? Am I equal in ability to others here? Can I compete? In many cases, the answer to these questions by Native American students is NO, due to the lack of quality high school preparation and students know it.

Loneliness . . . too many people, no family, few Indians for support. We run to the ocean, camp in the mountains when we can. Call our families often. The Dean's phone can be used by students to fight the homesickness.

All of the words I have shared with you about others at the University are about me. I am a man at war with himself daily. Trying to represent the Native American community, the University and myself. What students experience at the University, I have also. We are survivors and will adapt.